

Post-It Norming

How might we help students reflect on previous group experiences and identify group norms to minimize dysfunction?

Overview: Most students can recall one (or many) group projects that have gone awry – from teammates who don't show up on time to jokesters who drop the ball at the last minute. This activity is designed for three purposes: (1) To help students identify and share disruptive behavior in previous group work situations, (2) To encourage reflection on their own skills and contributions, and (3) To scaffold the conversation about conflict while setting group norms and expectations

Time Required: about 45 minutes (depending on group size)

Materials: Post-It notes (4 per student), pens or markers, paper (for norm-setting), you may also want a PowerPoint or other method of displaying the questions

Details: Once groups have been formed, have them work together on this “storming and norming” activity.

Explain that they will be participating in a roleplay activity about group conflict and norm-setting. Each student takes 4 Post-It notes. Ask students to think back to their previous group work experiences. On each of the first two Post-Its, ask them to write a characteristic of a challenging teammate they've worked with (Ex: “Always late to meetings” or “Interrupts people constantly”). It may be helpful to use these as examples when explaining the activity. They will need 3-5 minutes to complete this.

On each of the final two Post-Its, ask them to write a positive characteristic they bring to the group (Ex: “Make sure everyone's ideas are heard,” or “I'm great at delegating”). They should now have the following Post-Its:



Ask students to turn these over and shuffle them. Each teammate draws one Post-It and now must embody that characteristic in a short roleplay. For example, if they draw the Post-It that says “Interrupts people constantly,” they will do so during the roleplay. Encourage students to really get into character.

Explain that students will be asked to complete a task in 2 minutes. It's less important that they complete the task than that they embody the characteristic they drew. Some sample tasks include:

- Come up with a team name
- Make a list of potential graduation speakers for your school
- Decide how to pick a leader
- Brainstorm a list of the steps needed to complete your group's assignment

At the end of each two-minute roleplay, give students 5 minutes to debrief the experience and to generate a list of norms (or “group expectations”) that would have helped the situation go better. Debrief these norms as a class and ask students to complete their “Group Norms” as a homework assignment, adding other norms that might be helpful but that weren't addressed in the roleplay exercise.

Suggested reading:

Oakley, B. (2002). It Takes Two to Tango: How 'Good' Students Enable Problematic Behavior in Teams. *Journal of Student Centered Learning*, 1(1), 19-27.

Oakley, B., Felder, R. M., Brent, R., & Elhajj, I. (2004). Turning student groups into effective teams. *Journal of student centered learning*, 2(1), 9-34.

Strong, J. T., & Anderson, R. E. (1990). Free-riding in group projects: Control mechanisms and preliminary data. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 12(2), 61-67.